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# **HIS MOTHER'S PRAYERS**



**By CHARLES M. SHELDON**



**CHICAGO**  
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**1903**







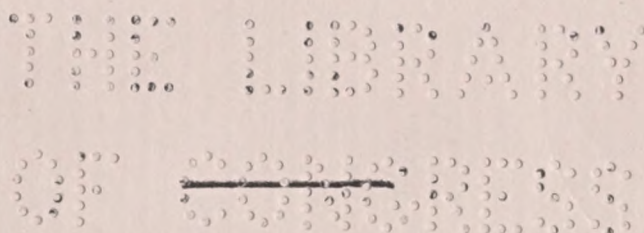
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AUTHOR OF

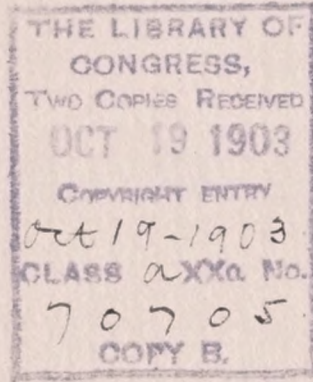
"In His Steps," "John King's Question Class," "Edward  
Blake," "Born To Serve," etc.



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# HIS MOTHER'S PRAYERS.

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'M SICK of the old farm and everything about it," said Andrew Miner, as he came into the little kitchen of the farm house one evening and set a pail of milk down on the table.

His mother, who was washing dishes at the kitchen sink, turned a pale, worn, anxious face towards the boy.

"What's gone wrong now?"

"Everything. We don't have anything fit to do with. It's just slave all day to make a living and we're no better off than when Father died. I don't see the use. I want to quit it, Mother, and go to town. Let's sell this old farm and go to town to live.

"And who'd buy the old farm and pay anything for it if we put it up for sale?" asked an older boy, coming in at that moment and putting another pail of milk down on the table. "The Cranes have had their farm on the market two years now and no buyers. If we put it up to auction we couldn't get a song for it. Talk a little sense."

"Talk a little yourself," exclaimed Andrew passionately. "It's what you always say whenever I suggest doing something to better ourselves. You may be willing to slave all your life for a lot of good-for-nothing cattle and hogs; but I don't intend—"



"Oh get out! You're always talking about slaving; but I notice you always let me lift the heaviest end. You didn't do your share of the milking tonight."

"I did too! You're always—"

"Boys! Boys!" Mrs. Miner spoke with great agitation. "It's dreadful for you to quarrel so. You will kill me if you don't stop it!" She sat down suddenly and put her thin fingers over her face. The tears trickled through upon her hands and the boys were silent. After a moment the older one emptied his milk into a couple of pans, picked up his pail, and went out.

Andrew stood irresolutely by the table.

"I'm sorry, Mother." He went over by her side and spoke as if he was ashamed a little. "Rod nags me all day. He complains if I stop at the end of a furrow to take breath. He's always at me for one thing or another. And I hate the whole business. Mother, I could earn something in town, and you could get a girl to help in the work. Jim Walker went to Colby last winter and he's in a hardware store there getting thirty-five a month, and he hasn't had any more training for it than I have. He says he thinks he can get me a place in Mansfield's grocery at twenty-five to start with, and I'd sooner work a year at that than keep on pegging away at this old farm, where we never get ahead any."

Mrs. Miner was drying her tears on her apron.

"But, Andy, you're my baby. What could you do alone in the town? You ain't big enough."

"Why, Mother! I'm no baby any longer; I'm eighteen, and I weigh a hundred and forty-five, and I know as much as Jim Walker any day. I can't stand it on the



farm any longer. We never have any fun, and we're nothing but clodhoppers anyhow."

He flung himself down moodily in a kitchen chair, and his mother got up and resumed her dishwashing. Andrew was not looking, or he would have seen a tear fall from his mother's eyes into the dishwater. Her thin hands trembled as she took the dishes out and began wiping them. She was trembling so violently that one of the heavy plates slipped from her grasp, fell with a crash upon the floor, and broke into half a dozen pieces.

Andrew jumped to his feet and exclaimed, "Why, Mother! what's the matter? Are you sick? Here! You sit down and let me finish the dishes. You are not well."

The boy insisted on her going into the other room and lying down on a couch there, while he finished the dishes. While he was at work the older boy, Rod, came in with another pail of milk.

"Where's Mother?" he asked briefly.

"In the sitting room."

Rod strained the milk and then went in where his mother was.

Andrew could hear them talking; at first in low tones so that he could not catch the words. At last he heard his brother say,

"Oh, well, Mother, if Andrew has got his mind fixed on going to town, might as well let him go. He's been of no use on the farm for more than a year. He takes no interest in the work, and I can get along about as well without him around."

Andrew could not hear the mother's reply; but from



the tone of Rod's next remark he inferred that she had given a feeble consent.

"He won't need much of an outfit to start on. If he gets the position at Mansfield's it will just about keep him in board, lodging, and clothes; but won't leave him any margin for foolishness."

Andrew finished the dishes and scalded out the milk pails, and when he came into the room where his mother was Rod had gone up stairs.

"Rod thinks you might as well go, if you want to, Andy," she said feebly. "But it doesn't seem to me as if I could spare you."

For the first time the boy seemed to have a little remorse.

"I'll stay, Mother! I won't go."

"No, you won't be easy till you've gone to live there. I wouldn't care if it wa'n't for the temptations."

"But there are plenty of temptations in the country, Mother, just as much as in the city." The boy spoke irritably, and his mother shrank back a little. "I ought to be able to stand up like a man."

"But you're not a man yet, Andy," his mother said, with a faint smile.

"I will be pretty soon," he muttered, as he walked irresolutely up and down.

They talked together for an hour, and at the end of that time Mrs. Miner seemed reconciled to the plan of Andrew's leaving the farm for Colby. Andrew noted her weariness, and suddenly exclaimed,

"You're all tired out, Mother! You must go to bed. Call me if you are ill in the night, won't you?"



"Yes, Andy; good night."

"Good night, Mother."

Andrew went up and put his arms around her shoulder and kissed her. It was evidently an unusual act, for she caught his arms and drew him nearer.

He seemed ashamed and drew back.

"Good night, Mother," he said again.

"Good night, Andy," she replied, and went at once into her room.

Andy's room was down stairs next to his mother's. He went into it and at once went to bed and to sleep.

When he awoke he thought at first that it was morning; but after a moment he heard the old clock striking eleven. It was a most unusual hour for him to be awake, and he felt nervous and irritable. Then, as he lay there after the clock had ceased striking, he heard a voice in the next room. The partition was very thin, and he could not help hearing the voice and the words:

"O Lord"—the voice rose in a tone that made Andrew wonder, because it did not sound like his mother's voice at all—"O Lord! be merciful to me. The boy! I don't want him to leave me! It's lonesome out here on this prairie which you have made to lie under the stars so silent and lost. Three of my pretty ones gone!" (Andrew's mind as he lay listening traveled out to the little cottonwood grove west of the house, where he had helped his mother and Rod dig three little graves for two brothers and a sister, all victims in one day of diphtheria before a doctor could reach them from Colby.) "And then Jason, and now my baby. I cannot bear it! O give me a vision of comfort! I need it so! Have I been wicked.



beyond measure, O Lord, that I am punished more than others? Janet and Elizabeth were such pretty children! How sweet they looked in their coffins! They smiled at us. But why, O Lord, did you pick them out of our garden, when there are so many other gardens to pick from? Did you need them more than I did, you who have all the world for your own? Could you not spare me my treasures? Oh, I am desolate! And now my boy! He does not love me. O God! When I drew him towards me tonight he shrank away! And I nursed him through peril and in midnight weariness. I pillowed his baby head on my bosom for fear you would take him from me. O Lord! are not my burdens heavy to bear? Is not my cross almost equal to yours? For you had the infinite, divine nature to support you while I am only weak, trembling, human! What am I saying? Forgive me, Son of God, I did not mean to blaspheme. But my soul is in the dark. Will you not take care of my boy when he leaves me? You have three of mine to play with. Will you not send an angel to guard my boy from evil? Surely you can spare one angel out of all the hosts of them that do what you tell them to. O God, spare my boy! O God, don't let him perish! O God, make him love me! O God, don't let him die as his father did! O God—"

Andrew could not endure any more. Every word stabbed him. He felt vaguely that his mother's reason was being shaken. A terror for the future took hold of him as he sprang out of bed and went into the sitting room and knocked trembling on his mother's door.

The voice ceased at once, but Andrew heard sobs.



"Mother! Mother! are you ill? Can I do anything for you?"

There was silence a moment; then Mrs. Miner answered in her natural tone, "No, Andy. Was I talking in my sleep? I am sorry if I woke you."

"Can I do anything for you, Mother?"

"No, dear boy. I will go to sleep. I am not in need of anything."

Andrew hesitated. His soul was still agitated by what he had heard. In the darkness he felt his heart beating heavily.

"You don't doubt my love for you, do you, Mother?" His voice trembled.

"No, Andy, I never doubted it," the reply came quietly. "Come and kiss me, and I will go to sleep, and not disturb you any more."

Andrew went in and kneeled down by the bed and kissed his mother tenderly. Then as he stroked her thin cheek with his fingers he said,

"Don't worry about me, Mother. I'll go to Colby and become a rich merchant, and take you away from this lonesome place, and make you a beautiful home, and you won't have to slave any more."

"I believe you will, Andy. I believe you will. Your old mother is not good for much. But you will not forget her, will you Andy?"

"Why, of course not, Mother!" Andy said, as he rose and went back into his own room. "Good night, and pleasant dreams, Mother."

"Good night, Andy."

Next morning Mrs. Miner did not show any signs of



unusual mental disturbance, to Andrew's great relief. He did not say a word about the night's experience, and did not tell her or Rod what he had heard.

In two weeks the boy had secured the clerkship in the grocery store at Colby, and one morning Rod drove him over. There were tears in Andrew's eyes as he kissed his mother good-bye.

"Don't cry, Mother. I'll send for you before long. Rod can get married and run the farm, if he wants to, and you and I will live in town."

Mrs. Miner waited till Rod had gone out with a bundle to put in the wagon. Then she flung her arms about Andrew's neck and kissed him passionately.

"I'll pray for you, Andy, every day and every night."

"Don't, Mother! Don't!" Andrew said, stammeringly. "Don't!"

"What! Not pray! But I must. I shall!"

"Well, well, Mother; I meant, don't worry. I'll be good to you. I won't forget."

His mother stood watching the wagon until it disappeared over a knoll, and then went back into the house. After the morning work she went out to the little cottonwood grove where the three small graves and one large one were, and when Rod came back late in the afternoon he could not find his mother anywhere. When he called her, she answered him. He went out to the graves and found her sitting there talking to herself. Without saying anything, he took her hand and led her, unresisting, back into the house.

The first months of Andrew's stay in Colby he wrote regularly twice a week to his mother. Then the letters



dropped off to once a week. In three months he was writing only occasionally. Rod had driven into town two or three times and brought back word that Andrew seemed to be doing well. He was steady, and his employers were satisfied with him.

Mrs. Miner had been grieving over the failure of letters.

"Don't worry, Mother. Andy is all right. He has to work long hours. Grocers' clerks have longer hours than any others. He never was much of a hand to write, anyway."

That was three months after Andrew had gone to Colby. Another month had gone by and during that time no word came out to the farm about the boy. Rod was very busy, and could not spare time to go into town.

One evening, after the chores were done, and Mrs. Miner and Rod were in the sitting room, a knock at the door startled them. When Rod opened the door he was greeted by the nearest neighbor who lived four miles away.

"I drove over this evening, Mrs. Miner, with some news I thought you ought to hear," the man said slowly.

"Come in," said Rod briefly. Mrs. Miner rose, trembling, her hands shaking so that she dropped the ball of yarn she had been holding.

"Is it about Andy?" she asked.

"Yes," said the man, "I thought you ought to know—I—" He stopped awkwardly, and his rough fingers grasped the side of his chair with a nervous grip, as he faced the mother and son in that lonely prairie house, where the dim lamp on the table showed their anxious faces. The mother bent forward with a trembling appeal



that seemed like the countenance of heavy sorrows anticipatory of a blow she must receive, but from which her frail spirit could not recover.

"Is Andy dead? Don't tell me he is dead!" She put out her thin hands in a gesture of appeal towards the neighbor.

"No—he ain't dead," the man answered slowly. "But you know Jim Walker. Jim's been at Kellogg's now for two years. His father came in yesterday and told us he heard Jim had taken to drinking. And he was going in company with your boy. Bud Noble saw 'em both in at 'Jake's Place' two weeks ago playing billiards."

"Is that all?" asked Rod, after a pause. His mother was sitting bent over, her hands over her face and sobbing softly.

The neighbor shuffled his feet awkwardly.

"Noble said both boys had been drinking some. I thought you ought to know. 'Taint easy to bring bad news. I wish to God the whole liquor business was in Hell!" the man added with an energy that was unexpected, as his dull eyes glowed with the fire of some past experience, in which the drink devil had had some part. And can you name a single family anywhere that has not at some time felt through relation, friend, or acquaintance, the blasting touch of this world-wide pestilence?

"It seems to me the business is there already," replied Rod with bitterness. His mother still continued her sobbing, but she was not violent. The man rose to go.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Miner. Wish I could do something for you."

"You can't do nothing, you, nor God, nor nobody," she



said in a muffled voice, without rising from her position.

The neighbor did not even say good night. He simply walked out, and Rod could hear his wagon rumble away across the prairie.

"Come, Mother!" Rod spoke in a tone that sounded rough and hard. "You go to bed. It's no use to cry over Andy. He's chosen his own course. Let him suffer for it. You nor I ain't to blame."

His mother raised her head timidly and touched the boy on the arm.

"Rod, won't you go into town tomorrow and see Andy?"

"What good will that do?"

"But won't you, Rod? Tell him he's killing me. And he promised. Tell him about his father."

"He knows about Father already."

"No, no, he don't, Rod!" The mother spoke with shrill earnestness. "He thinks Father was taken ill in Colby when we sent him in for the doctor. Remember, Rod, Andy was only nine years old then. Won't you go, Rod?"

"I'll go if you want me to, just to please you. But I know it won't do no good. Andy's got Father's blood in him. Nothing I can do nor you neither can keep Andy from drink now he's begun."

"But maybe God can!" Mrs. Miner almost shrieked it.

"I doubt it," Rod answered bitterly. "I don't believe God cares. If he does, why don't he strike Jake Lawson dead?"

"Rod, you must not talk so. God is love. If he ain't love we might as well all die and done with it."

Rod did not answer. His moody spirit, crushed down under the stress of the lonesome life of hard toil he had



known since a small child on the prairie farm, had little faith in a power which seemed to his narrow and bitter experience to be more relentless force than fatherly compassion. When he went to bed that night he had promised his mother again that he would go into Colby on the morrow, but he had no faith whatever that he could influence his brother, or prevail on him to break the habit of drinking now that he had begun it.

Since Andrew had left home, Rod had slept down stairs next to his mother's room. This night he awakened and lay there wondering as he heard the clock in the sitting room strike twelve. He was a sound sleeper and his waking was not natural. As he tried to sleep again, a voice in his mother's room startled him. It was deep and strong, unwavering, and hard in its metallic rhythm. It set his senses at once on the alert, and a fear tugged at his heart as he listened.

"O God! do you care anything for your children like me? If so, why have you made this wide, lonesome prairie, and made me live on it? If you love me, why have you killed my husband and my three pretty little ones? It must be cold and dark for them out there in the grove nights! But, O God! if you really care, why don't you save my boy Andy? He is my baby, now my others are gone. I would save him if I could; but I'm not God. Won't you save him? He's young yet. Isn't he worth saving? Nobody don't care for him but me, but they ain't nursed him and cared for him after hard days' works the way I have. If you want to love anything the best way is to suffer for it. And I've suffered for that boy. I've sat up nights by his crib, when I was so tired I



couldn't keep awake without burning my arm with a knitting needle heated over the lamp. O God! why do you let your children suffer so? We must be pretty wicked all these years to get all this punishment. But it seems to me sometimes as if the wrong people are punished. Why don't you punish Jake Lawson some? He's making money, and he seems happy. Why should my three little ones die because their father—O God! don't let Andy go to hell. Save him from hell, O God! Send me there in his place. Only I want to see my little ones again. They are with you, ain't they? They ain't in the ground, are they? Tell me, God, they ain't in the ground! They were just beginning to play. They were such good company for me when their father and the boys were at work. And our nearest neighbor four miles away. O God! I am lonesome. I've no one to play with. And now you're going to send Andy to hell. And it seems only last night I heard him say,

“‘Now I lay me down to sleep  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep—’

“Dear Lord! if you keep track of all the prayers that's said, won't you look up the number of times he said that prayer, and if he goes bad now won't you credit him with his baby prayers, so much in his favor? O Lord don't let him die forever! O God! save his soul! O God—”

As in Andrew's case, Rod could bear no more. He threw a blanket around him and went out into the sitting room and knocked at his mother's door.

“Mother! Mother! Are you ill? Do you want anything?”



The voice instantly ceased, and after a moment Rod opened the door and went in.

"Are you ill, Mother?"

"No," his mother spoke in her natural tone, but she was sobbing softly.

"There, don't cry, Mother. I'll go into town in the morning, and I'm sure Andy will straighten out. He's probably learned a lesson by this time."

"Do you think he will? Do you, Rod?"

"Yes, Mother. Don't worry. Go to sleep now."

"Did I waken you, Rod? I sometimes talk in my sleep."

"Well, well, Mother!" Rod replied evasively. "Don't worry. Go to sleep and forget all about Andy."

"I can't forget about him even in my sleep. I dreamt about him tonight. O Rod! do you think he's in danger?" She asked it trembling all over as she sat up. Rod could see by the dim light her strained, thin face, ghostlike, appealing to him. The sight irritated him, because it stirred memories of the past he wanted to forget.

"No, Mother!" he answered roughly. "Lie down and sleep. I tell you I'll go in and see Andy in the morning."

Mrs. Miner lay back submissively, and Rod started to go out. At the door he turned and said with a show of kindness,

"If you feel afraid or ill call me, Mother. I'll leave the door open. Good night."

"Good night, Rod," she said quietly enough; but the boy thought he could hear her sobbing again as he went back into his room.

In the morning he said nothing about the event of the



night, and about ten o'clock he harnessed up and started for Colby.

"Don't worry, Mother," he said as he drove away.

"I'll try not to, Rod. But you'll be sure to tell Andy I love him, won't you? Don't be hard with him, will you, Rod?"

Rod did not answer. He wished afterwards that he had, as at a turn in the section road he saw his mother standing in the doorway still looking at him.

Half way to Colby a part of his harness broke, and it was afternoon before he had succeeded in mending it so as to start on. When within five miles of town he overtook a neighbor who was stuck in a slough with a load of hay. By the time he had helped him out and had hitched into his own wagon again it was nearly five o'clock. He reached Colby about six, and drove at once to the store where Andy had been employed.

"Is Andrew Miner here?" he asked one of the clerks who was near the door.

"Miner, Miner? Oh you mean Andy. He hasn't been working here for two weeks. The old man fired him because—" The clerk made a movement as if drinking out of a bottle. Rod asked him if he knew where Andy boarded.

"No, I don't. Might try Mrs. Wycoff's."

Rod drove up to Mrs. Wycoff's; but she knew nothing of Andy Miner.

By this time it was getting dark, and Rod drove the horses to a livery stable foreseeing a possible night in Colby. After getting supper at a restaurant, he started out to find his brother.



It was after seven o'clock, and Rod went at once into Jake's Place. There were only a few men in the bar-room, and he passed through into the rear room where the card tables were.

The minute he pushed open the swinging door he saw his brother and Jim Walker playing cards at a table in one corner.

He walked over at once and put his hand on Andy's shoulder.

The boy looked up and at the first glance Rod saw that even that early in the evening Andy had been drinking.

"Hello, Rod! Where'd you come from?" he said, showing a little confusion.

"Mother sent me," Rod answered briefly. "Come out of here. I want to talk with you."

"Let's finish the game first. "We've only just begun. Your deal, Jim."

"No, you don't," Rod said roughly, and he leaned over and put his big hand on the cards. "You come right out. I want a talk with you and I don't want to wait. Mother will be anxious about my return. I've got a four hours' drive."

"You leave us alone!" Andrew exclaimed angrily, trying to pull the cards out from under Rod's hand. Rod's dark face grew darker.

"Andy, you drop that and come out of here or I'll drag you out by the hair. Jim Walker, I call you a miserable cur for getting my brother into this hole. If it wasn't for Andy here on my hands, I'd give you another smashing same's you got when I caught you trying to brand some



of our calves down by Major's Creek. No, you don't!" Rod anticipated Jim Walker's movement to get his gun, and with a lightning grasp that did not seem possible in one ordinarily so slow he seized Walker's wrist and twisted it in a vise-like grip. Half a dozen young men entered the room at that moment. Rod let go of Walker and turned to Andy.

"Come out!" he said savagely, and Andy did not dare disobey. He rose and went out with Rod who backed towards the door with his eyes on the wrathful face of Jim Walker.

Out on the street Rod said abruptly,

"Have you got a room anywhere?"

"Yes," Andy said sullenly.

"We'll go to it," Rod said briefly.

When they were inside a dingy little room in a cheap boarding house, Rod sat down and faced his brother who was almost sober now, and whose face showed a mingling of fear, shame and anger.

"Mother and I got word of your drinking last night. Mother lay awake half the night over it. You've lost your job in the store. What are you doing? Anything?"

"I've got a job in the hotel," Andy said sullenly.

"Must be a fine job," Rod said with contempt. "You seem to be in Jake Lawson's employ most of the time. How much does he give you?"

"You go—" Andrew swore. Even Rod was startled at the oath. He had never heard Andy on the farm swear, even under great provocation.

He looked more carefully at his brother's face. How swiftly the devil brands his cattle! The boy's face showed



already the unmistakable signs of dissipation, the coarsening and roughening of fiber and tissue.

"You are killing Mother, Andy," said Rod in a low tone. He related in a few words the experience of the night. Andrew seemed moved by it.

"I think Mother's mind is affected by all the trouble she has had, Andy." Rod spoke more softly. "She prayed as if she were another person. The tones of her voice were hard and unfeeling. It made me creep to listen to her. I've had to get her into the house three times from the graves since you went away."

"Mother has never got over that time," Andy spoke thoughtfully.

"No, and do you know, Andy, what makes that such a dreadful experience for Mother? It's not only the loss of the children Mother grieves over. You were only a little fellow at the time, and we never told you. But as soon as Elizabeth came down Mother feared diphtheria and sent Father right into town for a doctor. He never came back until the day after and then it was too late. The doctor couldn't save them then. And do you know where Father was all that time, Andy?" Rod got up and his rough face twitched nervously under the stress of his passion. "He was in Jake Lawson's Place, drinking and gambling while our little sisters were choking to death on the farm, and Mother was going wild over it. Is it any wonder Mother's mind is weak after all that?"

"And the constant lonesomeness and lack of neighbors and variety to take her thought off the death of the babies and Father. And now you go and tug at Mother's heart as if you didn't care, and help to make Jake Lawson rich



by buying his beer and whiskey—the man who sold the stuff that killed Father and the children, and—”

“Don’t! Don’t! Rod! I didn’t know! I’ll quit and behave myself!” cried Andy, breaking down and putting his face in his hands while Rod walked up and down like some wild beast.

“I haven’t any faith in you, Andy, and might as well say so.” Rod spoke with bitterness as he walked up and down past his brother. “You’ve got Father’s blood in you. You’d drink and gamble if you knew Mother was going to die the next minute. She told me to tell you that she loved you. You know she does well enough. But you don’t love her any. If you did, you wouldn’t do as you have been doing.”

“I do love her, Rod! I’ll quit drinking and playing and behave myself.”

“You say you will! Undress and get into bed! I’ve got to go home tonight or Mother will go wild. But I’ve no faith in your promises. The minute I start for home you’ll make a bee line for Jake’s Place,” continued Rod.

“I won’t! I tell you I won’t!” replied Andrew, but he spoke quietly and immediately obeyed his brother and went to bed. Rod walked moodily up and down.

I’ll tell Mother how I found you, and your promise. If you break it I hope Father and the babies will haunt your dreams as long as you live.”

He turned to go out and Andrew said feebly, “Won’t you tell Mother I am sorry, Rod?”

“I will if you act sorry for a month,” replied Rod. He blew out the lamp and went away without any farther



good night, and immediately hitched up and started for home.

He had been gone about half an hour when Andrew heard a pebble strike his window. He drew the clothes up over his head and kept still. Another pebble struck the window a little harder. Then a shower of small stones. Still he made no answer. After a moment he heard a step coming up stairs. He remembered the door was not locked and started up in bed to lock it, but before he could do so it opened and some one came in.

"Is that you, Jim?" he asked.

"Yes. Came up to see how you were." Walker struck a match, lighted the lamp and sat down.

"I'm all right," said Andrew sullenly. "Why can't you let me alone?"

"You left in the middle of the game. I don't call that square."

"We can finish—"

"Tonight," said Walker coolly. "But it's too cold here. Get up and let's go over to Jake's and have it out. You owe me a game. It's mean to quit when I was losing."

"I can't, it's too late. I've promised Rod—I've promised—"

"Oh well you don't need to play more than one game."

"No, I won't do it, Jim. Go away and leave me alone."

In reply Jim Walker took a whiskey bottle out of his pocket and going over to the little washstand took up a tumbler and poured out a drink. He came back to the table which was near the bed and set the glass down. The smell of the liquor began to pervade the little room. Andy's eyes began to glow with an unearthly luster and he



sat up in bed. Jim tossed off the whiskey and poured out some more.

"What makes you keep your room so cold? Have a nip just to warm you up?"

"No," said Andy but he eyed the liquor greedily.

Walker drank again, and again filled up the glass.

"It was a mean trick to cheat me out of the game. And after all the times I've stood by you to leave me in the lurch was a mean, dirty trick." He swore and drank again, setting the glass down on the edge of the table nearest the bed. Then he suddenly got up and walked over to the window and looked out.

"It's a cold night. Looks as if a storm was coming up."

He stood with his back to Andy but he knew what was happening. Andy had reached out his arm, taken a hasty drink of the whiskey, and set the glass down again.

Jim turned around and walked back to the table.

"Andy, do you think it was just the thing to cheat me out of that game?"

"I never cheated!"

"You did. You left before it was through. It would only be fair to finish. You needn't play any more if you don't care. If you'll come over to Jake's I'll set up the drinks."

"We'll just finish the game?" Andy said feebly.

"Yes, that's all. It's not late. Only nine o'clock. Come on, that's a good fellow. Remember how I've pulled you out of a hole many a time."

Andy got up and dressed and in twenty minutes was seated with Jim Walker at one of the tables in the wine room at Jake's Place, his brain reeling, his nerves on fire



with whiskey which he had begun to drink recklessly as soon as the cards were served.

The drunkard's chance at cards seemed to favor him. Game after game saw him winner. The stake was not large, but before eleven o'clock Walker had lost all his own money and several small sums he had borrowed of acquaintances.

At last in a spasm of intruding conscience, Andy threw down the cards and declared he would play no more. He swept up his earnings and poured them into his coat pocket staggering to his feet as he did so. Walker rose with an oath and tried to detain him.

"Play it out! You've no right to quit now!"

"Right to quit any time. Wrong not to quit," Andy said, and before Walker could stop him he had gone around another table and out of the side door.

Walker followed still swearing. "I'll even up with you for that brother of yours," he said following Andy up the street.

Andy turned and shook his fist at him. They were both in the middle of the street and both continued to stagger along cursing each other. As they came opposite the Methodist church, Andy stopped and waited for Walker to come up.

"Leave following me!" he exclaimed.

"I won't! You've got my money. You—you cheated!"

"I didn't! You lie!" Andy replied in a drunken rage.

He stooped over to pick up a stone in the street and Walker fired at him three times in succession. Andy reeled, took one step towards Walker, and fell face downwards in the dirt. Walker threw his revolver into the



gutter, and then turned and ran back in the direction of the saloon. Andy lay still in the place where he had fallen, and one more crime was added to the thousands upon thousands that drink and the saloon have helped to produce since alcohol was first brewed by man out of God's bread stuff.

It was nearly midnight when Rod reached home. He had driven as fast as he dared, thinking all the time of the brother he had left and his Mother who was waiting for him.

She came to the door as he drove up, and before he had stopped the horses she called out.

"Tell me, Rod! Is Andy all right? Is he safe?"

"Yes, yes, Mother. I left him in bed in his room. He promised to give up the drink and the cards and—"

Rod drove out to the barn, put up the team and came back to the house where he finished telling his mother the story of the evening.

Mrs. Miner, who had spent a long day and evening in a fever of apprehension, was quieted by his narrative.

"Then you do think he will grow up to be a good man, don't you, Rod? He will learn a lesson from it, won't he?"

"I hope so." Rod spoke slowly. He did not tell his mother what he had said to Andy.

Mrs. Miner went to bed and to sleep. In the morning Rod heard her singing as she was washing the breakfast dishes.

She had not done that for months. The boy went up to her and kissed her, a very unusual thing for him.

"I'm glad you feel so well, Mother," he said.



"It's on account of Andy," she said. "He's my baby, you know. But you're both good boys to me."

"I'm going to work at the fence down in the two mile swale this morning, Mother, so I may not get back at noon. But I'll come between twelve and one sometime."

"All right, Rod. Don't break your back over those heavy posts. You don't ever have any rest."

"I don't need any, Mother. One of these days when we get the farm paid for, I mean to see that you have a rest for the remainder of your days."

His mother smiled at him, and noticed his sturdy figure as he drove the team out of the barn yard.

"I've got two good boys. Andy's going to be all right, I'm sure," she said, as she continued to sing at her work.

About eleven o'clock a man drove up in front of the little farm house, and got down slowly. The horse was covered with lather and stood panting with exhaustion.

Mrs. Miner came to the door.

"Are you Mrs. Miner?" the man asked.

"Yes."

"I've a letter for you." The man handed it to her and avoided her look.

It was from the Methodist minister and it contained news of an accident to Andy. She was asked to go with the messenger back to Colby at once.

Mrs. Miner read the letter slowly, and raised her eye to the man.

"Tell me the truth about this—accident," she exclaimed, with a calmness that astonished him.

"He was shot," the man said after a silence, and again he looked down.



"And killed?" she asked, taking a step towards him.

The man looked up at her.

"He was killed, wasn't he?" she said gently.

The man choked down something.

"Yes, Ma'am, he was. I'm awful sorry. It must be a dreadful blow to—"

"Three of my little ones gone, and now Andy. But he was safe—" she began to reel on her feet, and the man hastily took hold of her and helped her into the house and upon the couch.

"Where's your other son?" he asked. "You need him now."

She told him quite coherently, and immediately began to talk about her three pretty little ones. The man hesitated, but finally went out and drove as fast as his horse could go down to the two mile swale. He found Rod there and at once told him the news of Andy's death, and the way his mother had taken it.

Rod got into the buggy at once and came back to the house. His mother was not there. He ran out of the house and over to the cottonwood grove where the four graves were.

He found his mother seated on his father's grave, with her back to the other three, making some lines on the ground. As Rod laid his hand on her shoulder she said with a smile, "Yes, there is room for another right here. I have been measuring. See, Rod. One, two, three, four, five, six feet this way, and one, two, three feet this way. Only, it's cold here, when it storms. Couldn't we, couldn't we, Rod, take 'em into the house when it rains? It's so cold out here."



"Come, Mother," Rod spoke between his clenched teeth to shut down fierce sobs; "come, you are not well. Come into the house."

"No! I will not come! I am going to stay here until they bring him to me. I am going to dig his grave! There is no one who can dig his grave like me. I made all his baby clothes."

She leaned over and began to dig in the ground with the cottonwood stake she had in her hand. When Rod attempted to lead her away she turned upon him fiercely and struck at him. He put his powerful arms about her and carried her into the house, and she shrieked and bit him on the cheek so that the blood ran down his face as he laid her on the bed.

The man went back to Colby alone and that evening a doctor came out. Rod had never left his mother's side. The doctor gave no hope. That trembling reason which had faltered and fallen on the side of madness during those moments when the stricken mother prayed her crazy prayer, had now altogether left the throne and what was left was a dangerous maniacal power that called for incessant watchfulness. As soon as the legal steps could be taken, Rod placed his mother in the state asylum and went back to the lonely farm, a brooding, bitter, hard young life, known among the scattered neighbors in that township as uncompanionable and silent, the tragedy of drink branded into what might otherwise have been one of the stalwart, useful children of men.

In the state asylum there is a woman who every night in her padded cell is heard to pray for her baby Andy. It is the same prayer of accusation and petition. The at-



tendants know it by heart, and pay no more attention to it than to the ravings of their other patients. The Methodist minister who once heard it on a visit to the asylum, did not recover from the effect for weeks, and says it was the most pitiable thing he ever listened to.

Jake Lawson, the saloon man is getting rich. He drives one of the best turnouts in Colby. He is putting a large addition to his house this summer. Jim Walker got off on a plea of self defense, and is one of Lawson's best customers. And the prayers of widows and mothers all over the world still go up to God. Is God dead that he does not hear? And are men dead to all love and justice that they still license and support the only institution in the world which has centuries to its record of producing crime, insanity, pauperism, broken hearts, and ruined lives? Are they wasted? Make answer, Brothers and Sisters. For the blood of these little ones and these crushed ones cries out to us from the ground.



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